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# Samoa's education policy: Negotiating a hybrid space for values

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper analyses the education policy of Samoa to examine the values that are presented within as relevant to the education system. Drawing on the theory of postcolonialism and globalization, we illustrate how the global and local interact within the education policy to create a hybrid, heterogeneous mix of values and, while the policy acknowledges the significance of Samoan values, it is principally directed towards universal values being incorporated into the education system. We undertake a critical policy analysis to illustrate how the hybrid set of values are indicative of a neo-colonial discourse and argue that universal values are required, however, these need to be equally matched with local Samoan values for the education policy to be highly relevant, authentic and applicable to the Samoan education context.*

*Key words: Samoan values, Education policy, globalization, postcolonialism*

## INTRODUCTION

Education policies have largely been sites of contestation as global and local values intermix to create discursive practices that are translated to local practices. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) observe, attending to the policy discourses that have emerged through “global networks” requires attending to the “institutions, organizations and individuals who are bearers of globalized education policy discourses” (p. 44). The increasingly “global education policy field” (Ozga & Lingard, 2007, p. 69) created through education borrowing, that is “conscious adoption in one context of policy observed in another” (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; see also Steiner- Khamisi, 2006) is a strategy adopted by policy makers to avoid uncertainty of novel policies (Nedergaard, 2006). In keeping with the global trends in education, the education policy in Samoa proposed by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC, henceforth) in its 2006-2015 strategic plan focuses explicitly on universal values in education rather than on core Samoan values.

This paper undertakes a critical policy analysis of the *Strategic Policy and Plan* (June 2006- June 2015) of MESC to illustrate the global trends in education that are promoted by the policy, particularly through the five key concepts of equity, quality, relevancy, efficiency and sustainability. The education policy originated from the practices of the World Bank and donor nations and, while the policy promotes the core values of *fa'a-Samoa* (the Samoan way), it does not integrate *fa'a-Samoa* values explicitly or appropriately within its mandates. A caveat that we recognize is that almost all the core Samoan values underwent some transformation due to the long period of colonization; however, our standpoint is that it is in identifying the heterogeneous, hybrid, core Samoan values and in foregrounding these that Samoan education system becomes relevant for Samoans.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Colonialism in Samoa led to the adoption of a model government based on British Empire and the acceptance of an education system that insisted on the coloniser's language, knowledge and skills being promoted. Colonization in Samoa brought big changes to the educational landscape and the values invested within education. The deliberate attempt by colonisers to change the values and behaviours of people was aimed at converting Samoans to Western values. As we will argue in this paper, as most Samoan values were incompatible with Western values, colonizers changed the essence of the cultural values to suit their own socialization processes ( see also Tavana, Hite & Randall, 1997) .

As Burnett (2005) observes, the colonial influence continues in the form of aid agencies and global agendas having significant influence on the education system in the Pacific region. Further, as Ashcroft, Griffin and Tiffin (1998) note, the oppressively interwoven manner in which colonial ideas operate make it difficult for policies such as MESC (2006) to be free of colonial undertones; a postcolonial reading, therefore, illustrates how stereotypical colonial notions are entrenched in the system. Adopting a post-colonial stance implies undertaking a rigorous examination of the oppression encountered by the colonised people and exposing the history of symbolic violence of the coloniser. Currently, a postcolonial Samoa has discovered that most of its cultural and social values have been reinvented to coincide with its new ways of living. In the current education system, most of these social and cultural changes have now been introduced into the curriculum. Students are now expected to learn and acquire new social and cultural ways of being and teachers are expected to perform to these new norms and modes of operation.

Postcolonial theory, in this study, is a means to question and examine the values proposed by education policies and expose these as a reproduction of colonial power. It provides an avenue for the voice of the Other, so that the territory can be re-appropriated and re-presented. This study responds to colonialism by theorising the concept of hybridity and heterogeneity. Hybridity assists in clarifying the place of Samoan cultural values in a Western type education system and offers a possibility to consider an in-between space that gets created through mimicry and ambivalence (Bhabha, 1994). Moreover, it also assists in justifying how, within a post-colonial society, Samoan values can contribute to a system that caters to Western knowledge and skills. Another key concept within postcolonialism relevant to this study is heterogeneity. Heterogeneity, as defined by Goldberg (2005), "is simply the general characterisation for diverse social arrangements that, in fact, have been historically fashioned" (p. 73). Heterogeneity in relation to culture indicates an understanding that culture is made up of many different types of entities. As Burnett (2007) states, contemporary ways are defined by "cultural and identic fluidity, heterogeneity and mobility" (p.263). Even the local context is experiencing change in terms of beliefs, knowledge, values that are mobile (Burnett, 2007). Therefore, we argue that with Western systems being quite diverse and local values and culture being mutable there is a crossover of cultures and values that needs to be recognised by the education policy.

Globalization is another significant influence on the Samoan education system. "As a set of processes that tend to de-territorialize important economic, social, and cultural practices" (Suárez-Orozco & Hilliard, 2004, p. 14), globalisation is a contested notion (Carolissen, 2012). Various described as Americanisation (Hirst, 1997) or global modernity (Featherstone, 1995), globalisation is a concern with the liberal and neo-liberal value systems that cross national boundaries to impact on indigenous ways of living and replace them with global ideologies and methodologies. In terms of education in Samoa, the impact of globalisation is felt through the on-going changes that are occurring to the education policy that is now designed around a Western—oriented, neo-liberal agenda. The aims of the present system are to infuse a market—oriented,

consumerist outlook where student numbers are important and student autonomy is stressed as necessary (Banya, 2010). Subsequently, the values that are stressed are individual achievement and success at the cost of social and civic responsibility. In the Samoan education system, global changes have led to strategic education policies relying on borrowed policies from donor countries and world agencies that have financially supported Samoa for education. However, whether the policy enables effective education is questionable and raises the need to amalgamate core Samoan cultural values to formulate an education system that is meaningful and relevant to present day Samoans. In order to clarify what we denote by Samoan values we describe these in the following section.

## RELEVANCE OF SAMOAN VALUES TO EDUCATION

Values are significant terms that provide meaning of how individuals are socialized in their environment. Aspin and Chapman (2007) describe values as a way of providing meaning to human action, “functioning as the rules” for individuals” (p. 27) and further state that values involve human behaviour and serve to rectify individual relationships between members of a society (p. 31). The five core principles of equity, quality, relevance, efficiency, and sustainability form the basis of MESC practices (MESC, p. 10). Equity implies providing fair and just treatment to all individuals and focusing on equal distribution of resources and providing appropriate knowledge. The concept of quality is situated within professional and technical knowledge and social and cultural practices generally, and acknowledges that *fa'a-Samoa* values must underpin academic, social behaviour. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of *fa'a-Samoa* is so that it will “better enable the individual to cope with change and relationships in an increasingly complex environment” (p. 10). The concept of relevance, while acknowledging local cultural and spiritual values, is more about individuals, communities, and national development. The value of efficiency means “optimum use of human, financial, and material resources at all levels; timely and quality service delivery; unhampered communication; and coordinated decision-making” (p.10). Sustainability requires appropriate utilisation of all educational resources to guarantee equal division amongst all individuals and schools in Samoa (MESC, 2006, p.10).

A study of local Samoan values highlights significant differences between these and the values regarded as core values that are embedded in the local context of Samoa. As Vaá (2009) notes there are core values that “guide social action” (p. 243). Commonly described, these values are: *alofa* (love); *faaaloalo* (respect); *va tapuia* (sacred relationship); *va fealoai* (mutual respect); *ava fatafata* (behaviour accorded to others); *usitai* (obedience); *tofiga poo tiute tauave* (responsibility); *feavatai/fetausiai* (reciprocity); *soalaupule* (consultation) and *galulue faatasi/fesoasoani ai* (collaboration); *faasinomaga* (identity); *tautua lelei* (good services); and *fai mea amiotonu* (honesty). These values comprised the essence of the Samoan way of life before and after the missionaries' arrival and during colonization.

As Silipa (2004; see also Eteuati-Faamanatu, N., Silipa, S., & Tuia, 2007) explains, *fa'a-Samoa* (the Samoan way) is the main influence of social and cultural values in Samoa. Furthermore, as Vaá (2009) observes, Samoans believe that values and beliefs are “social markers of ethnic identity” (p. 246). The performance of these values in social and cultural activities is a symbol of Samoan identity — it is a Samoan way of life or *fa'a-Samoa* that a Samoan must acquire and understand. The value of *alofa* (love) has to do with *amio lelei* (kindness) and *faaaloalo* (respect) for one another. Silipa (2004) refers to love as an authentic way of being benevolent (p. 267). This kind of love is displayed in *faalavelave*, sharing of resources between family members, between village people or assisting strangers who need food and water. This kind of love is also known to Samoan people as *o le alofa le faatuaioia* (transcendental love), where there is no boundary or limitation of affection. The value of *tofiga poo tiute tauave* (responsibility) relates to serving the

family, village and church. In Samoa, matai (a family chief) is responsible for all the lands and resources belonging to the extended family. In addition, his/her other role is to represent the family in village and district affairs. This was explained by Davidson (1967) as a village setting, where all the households in the village are headed by a matai, and each matai is responsible for the welfare of his family (p. 17). All other family members are responsible to ensure their family solidarity by sharing their work through *galulue faatasi* (collaboration).

Respect or *fa'aaloalo*, is also related to *va tapuia* (a sacred relationship), *ava fatafata* (behaviour accorded to others) and *va fealoai* (mutual respect). The Samoan way of respect is very crucial in *aiga* (family) and *nuu* (village) where children must know their sacred relationship and show respect to their parents and significant adults as well as to other children. As explained by Davidson, self-respect in Samoa is well protected by individuals, families and nation (1967, p. 30). This entails knowing how to converse with elders by using respectful words and displaying appropriate behaviours. As a result, it is the *tofiga poo tiute tauave* (responsibility) of all individuals to practice respect in their social and cultural activities. More importantly in *fa'a-Samoa* (Samoan way), family and village members must *feavatai/fetausiai* (reciprocate) with one another.

The value of reciprocity has much to offer to protect *fa'asinomaga* (the value of identity) in a Samoan family and village. In fact, Davidson (1967) indicated that each Samoan village is identified by its unique cultural, formal greetings of its principal matais. The value of reciprocity helps maintain a good family identity. In fact, it relies on collaboration and cooperation amongst family members. For instance, all family members must work together to protect their family chief's title, as well as providing *tautua lelei* (good service) to the family chief. In the Samoan culture, family members must display appropriate behaviour at all times while in the presence of family guests and village chiefs.

As Rilometo (2005) observes, in the traditional Pacific societies, "ways of teaching and learning are integrated within family and community life" (p. 14) and, as Mageo (1991) points out, in Samoa, the model behaviour is patterned on the core Samoan values. The MESC, however, interprets values as these form part of the present day global and local educational discourse. To comprehend how these are an attempt at neo-colonial, cultural imperialism we undertake a deeper analysis of the MESC policy document.

## METHODOLOGY

The study utilised an interpretive, qualitative research methodology approach. In essence the potential key purpose of the qualitative approach is its capacity to elicit and synthesise rich and reliable information. Qualitative inquiry in this study aims to understand the values orientation of MESC policy and, as policy analysis dictates, to identify the problem with the policy. The data comprised of the policy document of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture's *Strategic Policies and Plan*, June 2006- June 2015 (MESC, 2006) and following a qualitative, interpretive methodology, situated reading of the themes was conducted to analyse the values embedded in the policy. In order to understand the thematic thrust of MESC, we took, at face value, what was in the policy and examined it for the influences of globalisation and themes of market oriented discourse. Adopting a critical analysis approach, the aim is to offer social and cultural critique by illustrating how far the Samoan values are reflected in the policy. A critical analysis also helps by subverting the existing policy perspectives with alternate perspectives.

## EDUCATION POLICY

The current education system with its five key concepts presumes to provide an ideal education system to guide the spiritual, cultural, social, intellectual and physical potential of all participants (MESC, 2006). MESC's vision is, "a quality holistic education system that recognises and realises the spiritual, cultural, intellectual and physical potential of all participants, enabling them to make fulfilling life choices" (2006, p. 4). To a limited extent, the five key concepts support the hybrid education system in Samoa as a mechanism to generate academic knowledge and skills. Following Green (2006) we argue that these second hand educational concepts are placed in underdeveloped nations without considering their compatibility to the society and culture of the people. As the policy states, the information gathering and a series of meetings of the Ministry, ADB, AusAid and NZAid missions led to "identify elements to create a vision for the Ministry" (p. 8). It shows that education in Samoa has been driven by policies that other countries have used in the past and present and Samoa is expected to utilise these borrowed education policies in order to sustain economic and educational relationships with donor nations and world agencies. This educational process is intended to proving the quality of education while continuing at the same time, to improve equity, relevancy and efficiency. In light of scarce resources, the process will adopt measures for cost effectiveness and sustainability. It will above all ensure the development of resources – human, material and financial. (MESC, p. 8)

The overall aim of the Samoan education system is for all students to be equipped with local and global knowledge, values and beliefs that situate them as glocal citizens. The policy claims that good maintenance of these educational areas will contribute to better learning and fostering of diverse knowledge in different educational programmes. While the five key concepts stress the significance of incorporating local, cultural and spiritual values of Samoa, the philosophical understandings about education signal a different focus. The philosophical understandings stress the commitment to international agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and education that "must equip the individual to engage confidently in the modern world and a rapidly changing society" (p.11). The goals of education are explicit in the global focus of the policy:

*Education is recognized as pivotal and critical in all strategies to address the global problems of environmental degradation, developmental impacts, poverty, hunger, disease especially HIV/AIDS, governance, conflict and war. The Government of Samoa is a partner to many of these global initiatives (p.11).*

It is significant that the education policy recognises global issues, however, there is a lack of a specific goal on how the cultural and spiritual values or *fa'a-Samoa* core values mentioned earlier in the policy are to be attained. As a goal, quality improvement is stated to be achieved through a commitment to "quality goals which include improvement to literacy and numeracy and teacher quality" (MESC, p. 11) amongst other ideas, however, there is no mention of quality improvement through a reaffirmation of some of the core Samoan values that form the basis of daily life in Samoa.

The aim of the curriculum according to the policy is to capture the social, cultural, educational, and political values, beliefs and ideas of a heterogeneous society. As indicated by MESC (2006):

*The Samoan curriculum emphasises the need to develop environmentally and socially sustainable practices. This applies not only to the physical environment but also in the way society structures itself socially, culturally and economically. (p. 38)*

The curriculum is intended to educate teachers and students to realise the social, cultural, and other resources in their environment (MESC, 2006). The objective is to produce skilful and intelligent citizens for the nation's future. As Edwards and Usher (2000) have suggested the "impact of globalisation on curriculum...is to enable learners to engage as global citizens or consumers –covering... issues such as global values, sustainable development and environmental education" (p. 47). This is reflected in the attempt made in MESC to reflect global values in the curriculum such as "holistic approach to education" (p.13). However, this global curriculum discourse, as Nordtveit (2010) observes, highlights an underlying colonial influence that can be perceived as still active behind the operation and organisation of educational curriculum in Samoa. As Nordtveit (2010) states, "curriculum ... is not targeted at improving the students' economic wellbeing, but is based on a colonial inspired academic rationalist discourse" (p. 325). This colonial rationalist discourse is reflected in the MESC's curriculum objectives, where most ideas and values commodify Samoan values within relevance and sustainability.

Within the overtly Western five basic principles of the policy, the curriculum section of the policy aims to achieve a set of hybrid values that are not specifically identifiable as Western, religious or Samoan, but are comprised of heterogeneous, global cultural traces. For example, "The Samoan Curriculum recognises that *fa'a-Samoa* must be upheld and that community, families and parents play a large role in the education of students" (p. 38) does little to specify the aspects of *fa'a-Samoa* that need to be upheld, in contrast to the curriculum values that are universal, for example, fairness and collaboration, wisdom and excellence, honour and respect (MESC, pp. 38-39)

That the policy aims to focus on Samoans acquiring an international status in primary education is stated through access to "universal provision and access to primary education with a broad and enriching curriculum to enable all students to realize their full potential" (p. 12). The access to secondary education aims to enable "a comprehensive range of educational experiences which will enable students to make informed choices about their future" (p.13) while postsecondary access is about "flexible educational pathways for all people" (p.13). Terms like "universal provision" (p. 12), "human resource development, market and employment needs" (p.13), and "flexible educational pathways" (p. 13), "community partnership" (p. 15) do not explicitly outline relevance to the Samoan way of life or to Samoan values. While space prevents us from a deeper analysis, we note how the policy stresses the significance of cultural understanding as "appreciation of family history, cultural norms inherent in the *aiga* and village systems" (p. 13), yet there is little by way of specifying the cultural norms or cultural ways of appreciation of family history.

We acknowledge, as MESC (2006) does, that change in education is unavoidable. As MESC (2006) states, "Change is inevitable. Education must equip the individual to engage confidently in the modern world and a rapidly changing society" (p. 11). Samoa has to accept change in order to survive in the modern world. Nevertheless, in order to survive these global changes, the education system needs to explicitly encounter the in-between space and embrace hybridity through aligning core Samoan values with the larger global values. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994; 2005) notion of hybridity elements of Samoan culture integrated into the globally oriented curriculum can create an enriched third- space, so that education becomes a mechanism that can generate relevant knowledge and skills for Samoans. At present, there is educational borrowing that results in mimicry and ambivalence with the resultant effect of "a mottled background" (Lacan cited in Bhabha, 1994, p. 172) being present in the policy.

Curriculum values such as responsibility, hospitality and reciprocity promote general educational connotations as these reiterate that "students are responsible for their actions and take actions to assist others" (MESC, 2006, p. 39). The values of honour and respect, where "others are treated with consideration and sensitivity, the physical environment is maintained and cultural, spiritual

values and societal rules are adopted by all” (MESC, 2006, p. 39) are universal values of all good curriculums. The value of tolerance ensures that “differences and diversity within society is respected and accommodated” (MESC, 2006, p. 39). The value of tolerance is based on the difference and diversity valued in a globalised world and gathered from the different systems of donor agencies rather than an explicit acknowledgement of the Samoan value of *va fealoai* (mutual respect).

The issues of equity, quality, efficiency, relevancy, and sustainability in education as outlined in the Samoan education policy are questionable as these lack specific social, cultural and educational relevance for Samoan students and teachers. The absence of specific reference to Samoan values can be perceived as a reflection of colonial agenda one that embraces neo-colonial values, beliefs and ideas. It could be argued that policy makers perceive an explicit global focus and universal set of values as a move towards successful education, and an explicit incorporation of Samoan values to be associated with a retreating mentality. While we do not claim there are pure Samoan cultural, social and educative values, an explicit incorporation of the hybrid Samoan values would imply a truly postcolonial agenda of placing the education system within a heterogeneous third-space. The primary discourse of neo-colonialism that emerges is of rescuing the education system through justification of universal, primarily Western values. A postcolonial discourse highlights how the use of universal, globally focused values reflects the Western ideal of an efficient education system, one that is colonial in its expectation so that it would be readily accepted.

## CONCLUSION

While the Samoan education system has been hybridised, Samoan cultural values are caught in the middle of hybridisation and heterogenization. Social, cultural, and educational values are no longer homogeneous but have become heterogeneous through marked mimicry of Western ideals. On the basis of a document analysis we demonstrated that there is an absence of *fa'a-Samoa* values in the education policy. The findings are limited due to the limitations that are inherent in relying on one policy document as a data source. However, the document being representative of the organization to the educators and the public have discourses of the organization and what it purports as acceptable and important.

An alternative discourse means would be to critically examine the educational conditions that promote a lack of awareness of the *fa'a-Samoa* values and reiterate these through teaching and learning activities. Reconceptualizing the values from an indigenous perspective and employing a postcolonial response of resistance to uncritical acceptance of universal values would be another step to challenge the neo-colonial agenda of policy makers. As Luke (2005) states, “the normative answers for education systems might indeed be blended, hybrid and laminated” (p. xvii). We reiterate that policies that draw on rich, contextual elements and concepts would be exemplars for an effective education system.

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